

Hālau Mōhala ‘Ilima  
Merrie Monarch Festival 2011  
Makanani Akiona, Miss Aloha Hula Division, ‘Auana  
**Hula Ho‘okūkū:** Competition Hula

## Nani Wale Ke‘anae

*Haku Mele:* Alice Johnson.

*Discography:* 1) “Nane [*sic*] Wale Keanae,” Pauline Kekahuna & Her Hauoli Girls Featuring Alice Johnson, Waikiki 45530.  
2) “Nani Wale Keanae,” Halona, *Cha-lang-a-lang Today*, Pumehana PS 4904, 1978.  
3) “Nani Wale Ke‘anae,” Tony Conjugacion, *Nā Hula Punahele*, Mountain Apple, 2007.

*Our Text:* As sung by Alice Johnson on Waikiki Records and shared with us by Keawe Lopes who received it, in turn, from Kimo Alama Keaulana. Translation by Kīhei de Silva. A slightly different version appears on the huapala.org website where it is identified as belonging to the Baker Collection.

One of the most compelling images in Hawaiian poetry is that of the pōhaku kū, the anchor stones used by fishermen and kapa-makers to keep their net-bottoms from furling in the tide and their set-out-to-dry bark cloth from flying away in the wind. Chants like “‘Au‘a ‘Ia” and “Hulihia ke Au, ka Papahonua o ka Moku”<sup>1</sup> warn us of the danger of neglecting these stones; if we allow them to come loose or roll free, then the fabric of our identity will be lost to the currents of time and change.

For all their apparent warmth and inclusivity, the best-known Maui compositions of Alice Johnson are pōhaku kū, carefully placed anchor-stones that hold down her old-timer’s ‘ikena of the island in the middle of the current-tossed 20th century. “Aloha ‘Ia nō ‘o Maui” secures, in song and memory, the traditional epithets of beloved wahi pana (“Nā hono a‘o Pi‘ilani,” “ke kai holuholu o Kahului,” “Kepaniwai o ‘Īao,” and “Kilikila o Haleakalā”) at a time when the character of these places was first tested by the ever-visiting malihini of the tour industry. “Kaulana ke Kuahiwi,” adheres to the “mea ‘ole ia ala” perspective of the kama‘āina whose mist-shrouded residence stands apart from the already famous, much-visited, newly-built road to Haleakalā. And “Ho‘okipa Pāka,” preserves an older standard of beach use and hospitality in which the visitors are still native (*lehulehu*), their presence still circumscribed (*kīpa, noho*), and their experiences still sensual (*nanea, malu ‘olu, pulu, konikoni, hu‘i, and mā‘e‘ele*).

In all three mele, Johnson holds to a traditional worldview that imbues the ‘āina with vitality and the kama‘āina with the capacity for intimate response. The land is a lover whose beauty woos, welcomes, tantalizes, fascinates, and refreshes. May this beauty

never fade, she says; may we kama‘āina never lose the ability to see and respond. May these mele anchor us to a change-threatened ‘ikena.

“Nani wale ka ‘ikena iā Ke‘anae / I ka ho‘opulu ‘ia e ka ua Lanipili,” is the opening verse of “Nani Wale Ke‘anae,” a fourth, not-as-well-known Alice Johnson composition for three contiguous districts – Ke‘anae, Wailuanui, and Wailuaiki – on the Ko‘olau side of her beloved island. At first listen, the ‘ikena celebrated in this song is more malihini “viewing” than kama‘āina “knowing.” We seem to experience everything through the rolled down window of a car stopped on the roadway above: first the Lanipili cloudburst, then the peninsula spread out below, then the gently wafted fragrance of kiele, and then the call from Wailuaiki to move on to the next scenic point in our nani-ka-mea tour: nani Ke‘anae, nani ka ‘āina, nani ka pua, and nani Wailuaiki. Pretty enough, we think, but about as deep as an ABC postcard.

But all this is camouflage for a meaning-rich perspective that Alice Johnson has reserved for the ēwe hānau of these Ko‘olau lands – and for those us who refuse to shortchange the genius of Johnson and her generation of haku mele.

An 1877 edition of *Ka Lahui Hawaii* describes the Ua Lanipili as a relentless downpour: it can last for a week or more; it is often accompanied by thunder, hail, and creeping cold; it causes the kama‘āina’s attention to turn, like bubbling water, to lovers and cherished friends; and it inflicts the apparently less-sensitive malihini with boredom and weariness.<sup>2</sup>

Marie MacDonald tells us that name *kiele* is applied to both the native gardenia (also known as *nānū* and *nā‘ū*) and the common *Gardenia augusta*, a native of Southern China that was introduced to our islands by immigrant Pākē plantation workers of the mid-19th-century.<sup>3</sup> Jocelyn Linnekin reminds us that a number of these workers, upon completion of their labor contracts, married into the native families of Ke‘anae and the two Wailua, and many of their descendants still hold passionately to their Ko‘olau lands and legacy.<sup>4</sup>

Alice Johnson knew the Lanipili and kiele firsthand. She was a teacher in Ke‘anae’s one-room schoolhouse in the 1930s, and her students were the third-generation blossoms of a rain that had either driven out the malihini or made kūpuna of them. So her song celebrates the land, people, and conditions under which the kiele of Ko‘olau and Kina became one. It acknowledges the union of these two streams (wai-lua) of ancestry in the Ke‘anae children of her day, and it anticipates the beauty of successive generations of keiki (the wailua-iki) who call to her from the next bend in time’s road.

In about 1860, a newly-released contract laborer named Quan Sing left his “outside” sugar plantation, settled “inside” Ko‘olau, and married Helena Kealohanui Kaiha‘a of Wailuanui. In 1911, they took their infant granddaughter Helen in hānai, gave her Quan Sing’s Hawaiianized surname – Akiona – and planted her firmly in the Kaiha‘a taro lands

of Lākini (Wailuanui) and Pauwalu (Ke‘anae). 91 years later, Kepa Maly interviewed this Helen Akiona, now Kupuna Helen Akiona Nakanelua, at her Lākini home.

KM: By the way, was there a special song for this place that you folks ever heard, that the families would sing for Wailua or Ke‘anae?

HAN: Well, they had one, “Ke‘anae,” and I’m pretty sure was Alice Johnson. Because she taught here...she taught that song.

“Ke‘anae.” It’s a real nice one...That’s Alice Johnson because when she began teaching here, she composed that.”<sup>5</sup>

The popularity of “Nani Wale Ke‘anae” has waned considerably over the years, but we intend to revive its message here, at the Merrie Monarch Festival, in the person and performance of Makanani Akiona who is a great-great-granddaughter of Quan Sing Akiona and Helena Kealohanui Kaiha‘a and whose own grandmother Emmaline was, until recently, a lifelong resident of Wailuanui.<sup>6</sup>

Alice Johnson has left, for Makanani and her generation of kiele, a song still capable of anchoring a 21st-century young woman to her 19th century kūpuna kualua and to the māhele lands of Kaiha‘a (k) and Lu‘ukia (w), her kūpuna kuahā. When properly understood, the “e waiho nei” beauty of Ke‘anae is so much more than a postcard panorama in the eyes of a malihini. It reaches across the years and embraces its people in downpour and fragrance; it calls to those not yet born; it spreads out below, obvious, readily apparent, still accessible – to those who care enough to know.

### **Nani Wale Ke‘anae**

Nani wale ka ‘ikena iā Ke‘anae E ho‘opulu ‘ia e ka ua Lanipili	Simply beautiful is the sight of Ke‘anae Drenched by the Lanipili rain
Kau aku nā maka o nā malihini I ka nani o ia ‘āina e waiho nei	The eyes of the visitors are fascinated By the beauty of this land spread out below
He nani nō ‘o ia i ka pua kiele Me kona ‘ala onaona e moani nei	She <sup>7</sup> is so beautiful with kiele blossoms And her sweet, gently-wafted fragrance
Ke hea mai nei ‘o Wailuaiki <sup>8</sup> E kipa a ‘ike aku i kona nani. <sup>9</sup>	Wailuaiki is now calling To visit and know her beauty.
Ha‘ina ‘ia mai ana ka puana Nani wale ka ‘ikena iā Ke‘anae	The summary is told Simply beautiful is the sight of Ke‘anae.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> “Kaa ia ka alaihi o ka pohaku ku,” in Tatar, *Hula Pahu*, 180. “Ua hemo akula ka piko o ka aina / Ua hala ka alihi pohaku ku,” in Poepoe “Ka Moololo Kaa o Hiiakaikapoliopele” *Kuokoa Home Rule*, 5-29-1908.

<sup>2</sup> “UA LANIPILI. Aia omalumu mai na ao, a e haule mai ana na pakaua nunui mao a maanei o ua aina nei, a e hoomau ia ana ka noke mao ole a na pakaua, a e pohapoha mai ana paha na mapuna leo hekili i kekahi wa, a e kolo maele mai ana ke anu, a e haule mai ana na huahekili maluna o ka honua... a e hoea mau mai ana na hoomanao ana no na hoa'loha a me na makamaka, me he mau mapuna wai la ... I kekahi manawa e oi ana mamua o hookahi pule ka loihi o kona ua ana, a he uiha na malihini ke hiki mai neia ano ua.” *Ka Lahui Hawaii*, 29 Maraki, 1877, aoao 2.

<sup>3</sup> Marie McDonald, *Ka Lei*, Topgallant: Honolulu, 1978, p. 84, 124. “Popular and Traditional Lei Flowers,” *Hawaiian Encyclopedia.com*, [www.hawaiianencyclopedia.com/popular-and-traditional-lei-fl.asp](http://www.hawaiianencyclopedia.com/popular-and-traditional-lei-fl.asp).

<sup>4</sup> Jocelyn S. Linnekin, “Defining Tradition: Variations on the Hawaiian Identity,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 10, No. 2. (May, 1983), pp. 241-252.

<sup>5</sup> Helen (Helena) Akiona-Nākānelua, Oral History Interview, April 26, 2001, in Kepa and Onaona Maly, *Wai o ke Ola: He Wahi Mo'olelo no Maui Hikina*, Vol 2:317. The Malys offer this summary of Tūtū Helena's life: “...Kupuna Helen Akiona-Nākānelua was born on O'ahu, in 1911. Shortly after her birth she was given, in the Hawaiian custom of *lawe hānai* (adoption) to her maternal grandparents to be raised. She was raised at Lākini, Wailua nui, on ancestral land which had been handed down to her grandmother, Helena Kealohanui (Kaiha'a) Akiona, from her kupuna Kaiha'a. Kaiha'a was a recipient of Kuleana land in the Māhele 'Āina of 1848 (L.C.Aw. 3472, at Pauwalu), and also the owner of at least two Royal Patent Grant lands; one at Pauwalu (Grant No. 2549, from 1859), and the other at Lākini (Grant No. 3177, from 1877). Kupuna Nākānelua is an extraordinary community historian. Over her 90 years, she has known many of the native families of the Wailua-Ke'anae region, and as in the custom of her kūpuna, she is a keeper of genealogies and family relations. Her recollections of the practices of families; places of residency; and stewardship and use of lands, waters and marine resources, is clear; and her interview is a significant contribution to the history of her community. Kupuna Nākānelua has worked in the lo'i kalo all her life, and with her mo'opuna, Kyle Nākānelua, she continues to tend the family lands. Her family is sustained by the land and waters which flow from the mountains to the sea. She expresses a great sense of responsibility to the natural resources of the land which her kūpuna entrusted to her. Kupuna has been active in matters of Native Hawaiian Water Rights, and has participated in many programs seeking to address restoration of the natural water systems of the Ko'olau region.”

<sup>6</sup> Makanani Akiona's great-grandfather, James Joseph AhPa Akiona I and Tūtū Helen Akiona Nakanelua's mother Eunice Lilinoe were brother and sister. Makanani's father, James Joseph AhPa Akiona III, was a student at Ke'anae Elementary School. Makanani remembers her grandparents' house at Wailuanui as surrounded by fragrant kiele, that homestead and six lo'i kalo are still in Makanani's family. Her grandmother is still alive, but can no longer live alone; she stays with a son in Ha'ikū.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson's non-restrictive use of pronoun, gender, and number in this and the next verse makes for delightful poetry but clumsy translation. “O ia” (he/she) refers to Ke'anae in “he nani nō 'o ia” and confers humanity on what, in English, is usually *it* or, sometimes, *she*. “Ka pua kiele” is technically singular but best understood as a collective noun: the kiele blossom(s). “Kona 'ala” (his/her fragrance) can be interpreted as referring to the perfume of Ke'anae, or to the perfume of the kiele blossom(s) (its/their fragrance)...or to the fragrance that belongs to land/person and blossom(s). “Ike aku i kona nani” (know his/her beauty), in the Wailuaiki verse, again invests the land with humanity, but again leaves the translator struggling with inadequate pronoun choices.

<sup>8</sup> The Baker text substitutes *pehea* for *ke hea*: “Pehea mai nei...” [http://www.huapala.org/Nani\\_Wale\\_Keanae.html](http://www.huapala.org/Nani_Wale_Keanae.html)

<sup>9</sup> Baker: “He ‘ike a‘e kipa...” for “E ‘ike a kipa.” Ibid.